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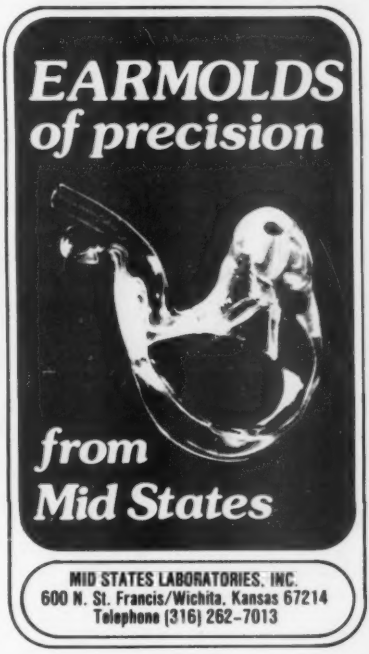
Hearing Aid Helps Art Carney

THE SOUND STAGE of the Astoria Film Center in Queens is the fourth-largest in the country and its vastness made the only set, a shabby and untidy apartment, seem even smaller. The apartment is the focal point of "Going in Style," and is shared by three elderly men, played by George Burns, 83, Lee Strasberg, 77, and Art Carney, a whippersnapper at age 60. Mr. Carney said that specializing in roles that are older rather than younger than his age has its compensations, and he has preferred them since winning his Academy Award for "Harry and Tonto." He also pointed out, "I don't have to worry about my waistline, but think sometimes that I ought to. And I don't have to be bothered wearing a prop hearing aid because I've got a real one. It's a great invention, the hearing aid. I'm turning up the volume now, but I can also turn it down." ■

Industrial Design Professor Urges Humane Design Concepts

JAMES PIRKL, an industrial design professor at Syracuse University, says that most products are designed to be used by "prime" consumers, the 18-35 age group. But such a common household device as a can opener or a stove can cause problems for an aged or handicapped user.

He cites the case of an elderly woman who had to turn off her hearing aid because her ears were irritated by the buzzer on the stove. More than one such product in the home can add up to what Pirkl calls "a hostile environment."

He suggests that the solution is to start designing products that can be used by all consumers, not just the agile young. If manufacturers and package designers gave a little thought to product design at the outset, by changing a proportion here or adjusting a dimension there, they could make the product usable by a much larger segment of the population.

"The transition to 'humane product design' is a lengthy and costly prospect for manufacturers . . . But more and more manufacturers are realizing that humane design is good business." ■